

VZCZCXRO3820

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DE RUEHBW #0644/01 1340641
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 140641Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0802
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 1344
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000644

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SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIA WEEKLY UPDATE (5/7 - 5/11)

REF: BELGRADE 623

¶1. (U) This cable summarizes the week's notable events relating to Serbia and Kosovo.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: For the week of May 7, Kosovo news was muted by the dominant story of last-minute government formation. Nevertheless, Belgrade media still reported on speculation about the draft UNSC resolution and indirect comments from Serbian politicians referencing Kosovo status as a factor in government formation. Serbia's diplomatic lobbying against a UNSC resolution continues apace, conspicuously affecting other multilateral deliberations. End Summary.

UNSC: THE VIEW FROM BELGRADE

¶3. (U) On 5/8, PM Kostunica expressed strong support for Russia's proposed UNSC resolution on Kosovo. Kostunica repeated that a new resolution must uphold Serbia's territorial sovereignty and integrity. The Foreign Ministry released an announcement calling for any resolution to respect the territorial integrity of Serbia, reaffirm UNSCR 1244 and continue talks between Belgrade and Pristina with "balanced international mediation."

¶4. (SBU) As reported in reftel, Serbia cited its diplomatic lobbying of UNSC members as a factor in other multilateral decisions.

¶5. (SBU) On 5/11, Belgrade media widely covered the report by Belgian PermRep Verbeke of the UNSC's trip to Belgrade and Pristina last month. The text of the report has not provoked much reaction here yet, with most attention focused on the larger question of Russia's intentions. Nevertheless, Serbian officials can be expected to use out of context passages about low numbers of IDP returns and unattained standards as part of their diplomatic lobbying efforts.

¶6. (U) Meanwhile, USG statements on Kosovo matters from both the Ambassador and Washington received consistent and thorough coverage in Serbia. In a 5/10 interview with Blic, the Ambassador stressed that the Kosovo question is completely separate from political processes in Serbia. "The Serbian government has had its opportunity for over a year to present its case and negotiate. Now that process is over, and the action has moved to New York where a resolution has been worked on that will lead to the supervised independence of Kosovo." The Ambassador said that the U.S. would continue working with Russia on Kosovo, but will not accept new negotiations. "We aim to bring a settlement of Kosovo status to a conclusion now, meaning this month, at the latest next month. Either we do it through a controlled process, through the Security Council, or things will happen in an uncontrolled way through which it will be much more difficult to provide safety and security for

all the people involved in this process." The Ambassador warned that the status quo will not hold.

¶7. (U) Belgrade media also gave wide coverage to U/S Burns' comments this week in favor of a new UNSC resolution paving the way for Kosovo's independence. The press highlighted Burns' statements that the U.S. will continue to work with the other members of the UNSC, the majority of whom support the Ahtisaari plan, on a resolution which would lead to a vote this month.

KOSOVO A MINOR ISSUE IN GOVERNMENT FORMATION

¶8. (SBU) Kosovo status was only referred to only obliquely during the government formation discussions. The only public comments came from newly elected Radical Speaker of Parliament Nikolic, who referenced on 5/11 Serbia's need for a "legitimate" government in advance of possible foreign recognition of Kosovo independence. Nikolic also raised Kosovo when discussing the possibility of Serbia declaring a state of emergency, saying that a Kosovo resolution could lead to such a decision. Nikolic downplayed all of his comments about declaring a state of emergency a day after, saying he was only noting the technical possibility existed. Privately, the Prime Minister alluded to the U.S. and other countries' pressure to resolve Kosovo as partly to blame in the strong performance of the Radicals in the elections (which he tied to his party's decision to elect Nikolic as Speaker). Also privately, former Minister for Human Rights (and DS ally) Rasim Ljajic told emboff that he saw the political divide which emerged from the vote for Nikolic based on Kosovo policy.

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

BELGRADE 00000644 002 OF 002

¶9. (U) Russia: Speculation on how Russia will vote at the UNSC continued to be a major story in Serbia this week. RTS and other Serbian media reported that Russia continues to push for an agreement acceptable to both Belgrade and Pristina.

¶10. (U) EU/Germany: Belgrade wires reported that PM Kostunica expressed concern to Germany Chancellor Merkel in a phone call regarding the EU's support for Kosovo independence.

¶11. (U) EU: Belgrade press also covered EU foreign policy chief Solana's reiteration of the EU's support for a new UNSC resolution on Kosovo. Stefan Lehne, the EU's envoy to UNOSK, also made news here on 5/8 voicing support for a new UNSC resolution as soon as possible.

¶12. (U) NATO: Serbian Army Chief of Staff Ponos's visit to NATO received attention in Belgrade media, particularly his statements that both the Serbian army and NATO share interest in keeping Kosovo stable and view violence in Kosovo unacceptable. Media also noted that NATO SYG Scheffer reiterated that the Alliance understood the sensitive nature of the issue to Serbia, and also supports Ahtisaari's plan as a resolution for Kosovo.

¶13. (U) Slovakia: Serbian media also gave coverage to Slovakian PM Fico's comments in Russia that Ahtisaari's report is unacceptable and that the other countries also understood the possibility of altering that plan

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